

Major Freeway Link Opens
Council President Scott Peters, First District
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Five years ago, Caltrans launched an ambitious plan to reduce traffic congestion in and around Carmel Valley to address an enormous increase in traffic volumes in the community.

The \$176 million project would widen Interstates 5 and 805 at the Merge to 24 lanes, including north and southbound bypass lanes to speed through traffic past notorious choke points around Carmel Valley Road and State Route 56. There was a lot of hand-wringing at the time about whether that much concrete would really reduce travel time, and whether building bigger freeways was an invitation to unchecked growth. Today we can confidently say that the widening project has reduced traffic congestion and improved the quality of life for Carmel Valley residents and commuters who travel those highways each day.

We recently celebrated the final milestone in the project, the southbound bypass between Del Mar Heights Road and Sorrento Valley Road. Designed for through motorists using SR-56 and Carmel Mountain Road, the project adds three lanes outside the freeways, separate from the existing freeway lanes, from the I-5/I-805 junction to Carmel Valley Road. Commuters should notice an immediate reduction in traffic through the merge, much as we experienced after the opening of the northbound bypass lanes last year.

Much credit goes to Caltrans and SANDAG, the state and regional transportation agencies who recognized the coastal corridor as a “lifeline facility,” and made this project a high priority. Credit and thanks also go to the residents of Carmel Valley, Torrey Hills and Del Mar Mesa who lived with a construction site in their community for 5 years with patience and good humor.

The 5/805 widening project is a major milestone in a series of transportation improvements underway in the City of San Diego. Additional projects are on the way, having been funded by the state transportation commission last month. San Diego County received \$451.5 million to fund critical transportation projects throughout the region, nearly \$150 million more than originally recommended by the commission staff.

The money comes from Proposition 1B, passed overwhelmingly by California voters last year. The measure authorized the state to sell nearly \$20 billion in bonds dedicated to transportation projects aimed at relieving traffic congestion, and allocated money among the state’s 58 counties. San Diego’s share of the Prop 1B money goes toward High Occupancy Vehicle lanes on Interstates 15 and 805, including four new managed lanes on I-15 between 163 and State Route 56.

We have more work to do to relieve congestion and reduce travel time, but I am confident that the improvements made to our freeway infrastructure and public

transportation systems over the past five years have improved the quality of life for families and commuters who crisscross our region each day.